

EPA Region III

Office of Public Affairs

EARLY BIRD HEADLINES

Friday, March 2, 2012

*** MORNING HOT LIST ***

Butler County residents protest after state tests of their wells absolves driller

PITTSBURGH POST GAZETTE Janet McIntyre of The Woodlands, a rural community in southern Butler County, said her well water foams and turns purple when it comes out of her faucet. "When I bathe in it, I get rashes, so I'm thinking I shouldn't be drinking it, either," she said Thursday afternoon at a rally and march by more than 75 people to the downtown Butler office of Rex Energy Inc. to protest the company's decision to stop providing replacement water to the McIntyres and 10 other families in the Connoquenessing Township community, 30 miles north of Pittsburgh. The chanting and sign-waving demonstrators, who brought enough jugs of water for the Woodlands residents to fill a pickup truck to overflowing, blamed Rex Energy's Marcellus Shale gas drilling operations near that community for contaminating the water wells. The company has provided the families with 800-gallon plastic tanks, commonly called "water buffalos," and filled them regularly for a year but drained and removed the last of them Thursday, citing a series of test results that fail to establish a link between the drilling and the water contamination. "A battery of tests have been performed by state-certified laboratories and environmental experts," said Derek Smith, a Rex spokesman, in an email.

\$1B Marcellus pipeline proposed

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER Since the Marcellus Shale boom took off, much of the natural gas produced in Pennsylvania has been shipped through existing pipelines to Northeastern markets such as New York City. But a partnership of three companies on Thursday proposed building a \$1 billion pipeline that would transport fuel from Northern Pennsylvania to markets in Central and Eastern Pennsylvania, as well as Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington. "We think it would be beneficial to Pennsylvania to have gas produced in the state consumed in the state," said Hugh J. Gallagher, a spokesman for UGI Corp. of Valley Forge, one of the partners in the proposed project. The proposed 200-mile, 30-inch Commonwealth Pipeline would transport at least 800 million cubic feet of gas a day - 800,000 dekatherms - if it goes into service in 2015. A pipeline that could connect local markets to the Marcellus would reduce transportation costs for customers, who now buy most of their fuel from producers on the Gulf Coast. The project is expected to announce a nonbinding "open season" this month for customers interested in acquiring capacity on the proposed pipeline. The location of potential customers would determine the pipeline route, Gallagher said. The pipeline would start in Lycoming County, where one of the partners, Inergy Midstream L.P., is building a pipeline connecting Marcellus wells in Bradford and Sullivan Counties. The route would travel "due south through Central and Eastern Pennsylvania," according to a news release.

Natural gas could mean big bucks for Maryland, study says

SOUTHERN MARYLAND NEWSPAPERS Maryland would reap about \$441 million over 30 years in severance taxes if natural gas is extracted from the Marcellus shale formation under the state's two westernmost counties, according to a study released Thursday by the Maryland Petroleum Council. "It should be noted that our estimates are pretty conservative," said Anirban Basu, an economist whose Sage Policy Group conducted the study. That estimate — which includes about \$214 million in revenue for the state, \$162 million for Garrett County and \$65 million for Allegany County — assumes that Maryland approves drilling and that the industry decides it is worth tapping about 710.1 billion cubic feet of reserves estimated to be available thousands of feet below the two counties. Depending on whether low or high production is allowed, the state and two counties stand to gain \$242.1 million to \$642 million from severance taxes. The taxes are based on a 2 percent state levy and a 5.5 percent local levy. Local impacts particularly would be "enormous," Basu said. Not only could landowners who lease land for drilling receive between about \$339 million and \$732 million in royalties, but about 1,800 more Marylanders could be working in shale gas production by 2025, according to the study. That is when production is expected to peak before declining under a projected 30-year span involving 365 wells.

City water-treatment company fined \$35,000 by EPA

LANCASTER INTELLIGENCER A Lancaster waste-treatment company has been fined \$35,000 for discharging industrial wastewater pollutants to Lancaster city's wastewater treatment plant. Armstrong Environmental Services, at 205 Greenfield Road, has agreed to pay the fine and take actions to minimize the likelihood of future violations, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. EPA said Armstrong, which is not associated with Armstrong World Industries, exceeded its permit limits for acidity levels, copper and oil and grease over five years. As part of the agreement, Armstrong did not admit liability for the alleged violations but has certified that it is now in compliance with applicable Clean Water Act requirements. Armstrong, founded in 1935, processes and disposes of a variety of municipal and industrial liquid and solid wastes for its customers. The alleged violations occurred at the company's waste-processing and disposal facility in Lancaster. The federal Clean Water Act requires companies discharging pollutants to publicly owned wastewater treatment works to obtain a permit limiting the amount of pollution that may be discharged to the plant. This usually requires some type of pretreatment by the discharging facility. Pretreatment permit limits are set for pollutants to prevent pollution of waterways caused by pollutants passing through the treatment plant or interference with the functioning of the treatment plant, EPA said.

Soaring sustainability: Eagles sign with solar-power giant at Phila. stadium

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER A year and a half after first announcing plans for solar power at the Eagles' stadium, the franchise announced Thursday that it had teamed up with a new partner - solar giant NRG of Princeton. NRG will design, build, and operate an array of more than 11,000 solar panels and 14 micro wind turbines that, over the course of a year, will provide six times the power used during all Eagles home games at Lincoln Financial Field, the team said. This time, the Eagles are working with a major player, a company that has already done a similar project at the Redskins' stadium, in the suburbs of Washington. Not that there's a competition, but team officials said it would be the biggest solar array in the NFL. "It was important for us to be as green as we could be," said Eagles chief operating officer Don Smolenski. "We're trying to be leaders in this area, and if that inspires others to try to catch us . . . it's one of those things where everybody wins." The installation is due to be completed by December. Plans call for a wall of panels on the south-facing facade of the stadium - visible from I-95. More panels will be mounted atop the overhangs at the top of the stadium. Still more will cover some parking spaces. Cars will be able to park underneath, and Smolenski said - half-jokingly - they will not interfere with tailgating or pregame football-tossing. Plans also call for helix-shaped wind turbines atop the stadium. However, these will be more eco-eye-candy than energy workhorses. "They'll provide a visual and a symbolic representation of our commitment to clean energy," Smolenski said. The arrangement is basically a typical "power

purchase agreement," where NRG owns the equipment and the energy it generates. The Eagles provide the real estate and agree to buy power back from the company for 20 years at predetermined rates.

Researchers Investigate Links Between Fracking And Water Contamination

WOUB-TV ATHENS, OHIO (Feb. 28) On the morning of December 15, 2007, Thelma and Richard Payne were jolted from their bed by surprise. "Things were crashing all over the place and it sounded like somebody was out there in the other room pulling out drawers and just letting them drop, and I thought, 'Somebody's out there ransacking our house.'" But it wasn't a thief that caused the commotion. "I got out of bed and looked and I saw of these things happening. The floor parting, the ceiling cracking, the side walls cracking, and hearing all of this stuff falling," said Richard. Their Bainbridge, Ohio home of 51 years had exploded and shifted on its foundation. Across the street on the same morning, Ruth Cooper woke up to an unusual sight in her garage. "When we opened up the garage door, there's this water up in the air, six feet in the air like a fountain," she said. That water was coming from her well. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources determined that highly pressurized methane had entered their aquifer. Ohio Valley Energy was held accountable for improperly constructing and monitoring a vertical well at the end of the road... The state says what happened in Bainbridge was a one time problem -- but in the small city of Dimock, Pennsylvania, water contamination has plagued their town. It's been at the center of a national debate over gas drilling and the extraction technique known as hydraulic fracturing. It's a process where millions of gallons of sand, water, and chemicals are blasted deep into the earth. This shatters underground shale and frees natural gas for collection. For Ron and Jean Carter, this process has hit home. In 2009, Cabot Oil & Gas drilled a well about 300 feet from their front porch. It was after they started drilling that Jean became concerned. "I noticed the water had an odor to it. Put a little in a glass, tasted it, and I thought, 'Uh oh. We have a problem,'" she said.

Welch settles with EPA on sewage overflow violation

WEST VIRGINIA STATE JOURNAL The city of Welch will implement a \$16 million to \$23 million long-term control plan to eliminate combined sewer overflows, and it will pay out a \$5,000 penalty split between state and federal regulators. The implementation is the result of a settlement reached with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for violations of the Clean Water Act. The plan will separate the southern West Virginia town's sanitary wastewater and sewage. According to a news release from the EPA, Welch was discharging approximately 400,000 gallons of raw sewage annually. The agency reached settlements related to combined sewer overflows in Elkins in October 2011 and in Fort Gay in January 2012. "Untreated sewage contains many types of organisms which can cause illness," the release from the EPA states. "People coming in contact with these organisms can suffer adverse health effects ranging from minor ailments such as sore throats, stomach cramps and diarrhea, to life-threatening illnesses such as cholera, dysentery, infectious hepatitis and severe gastroenteritis. Children, the elderly, people with weakened immune systems and pregnant women are more at risk of illness." The current sewer system collects various wastewater sources and pipes it to a sewage treatment plant. During high water events, the system can be overwhelmed, discharging untreated water contaminated with human waste, toxic material, debris and industrial waste. The city of Welch was sued over violations of National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System and Clean Water Act violations by the state Department of Environmental Protection and the EPA last year. According to information from the EPA website, combined sewer overflows present a problem for more than 772 U.S. cities, including several in West Virginia.

PENNSYLVANIA

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

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PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

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PSU team makes electricity while cleaning wastewater The word "wastewater" once said it all -- water sent down the drain to undergo expensive treatment for reuse or its return to nature. But a Penn State University research team views wastewater as an important energy resource, a raw material. By combining and refining energy technology, the research team has developed a two-pronged method of using wastewater to produce a more abundant output of

electricity than either method could do individually. The Penn State study, "Energy Capture from Thermolytic Solutions in Microbial Reverse-Electrodialysis Cells," written by Roland Cusick, Bruce E. Logan and Y. Kim, was published Thursday in Science. The microbial fuel cell uses microbes to consume plant or human waste to produce electrons that the fuel cell converts into electrical current. But that system, Mr. Cusick said, is inefficient. Adding a system that uses reverse electrodialysis, the research team pumped solutions of salt water and fresh water across specialized membranes that only allow positive and negative ions through, while also separating them. The separation of salt water and fresh water by the membrane generates an electrical voltage that directly increases fuel-cell power. As the ions migrate from the salt water to the fresh water, their movement also increases electrical current generated by the microbes.

South Fayette intends to fight state shale law South Fayette's natural gas drilling regulations are under attack from both the Marcellus Shale industry and the state. The township already is involved in a lawsuit with driller Range Resources and now looks to challenge the new state law that aims to replace all local ordinances with uniform standards of where gas wells, pipelines, compressor stations and other facilities can be located. South Fayette has joined other municipalities in considering legal action against House Bill 1950, which Gov. Tom Corbett signed into law Feb. 8. Commissioners voted 5-0 on Feb. 15 to authorize their attorney, Jonathan Kamin, to "investigate all potential legal actions" related to the state legislation. Deron Gabriel, commissioners' president, said legal action is "highly likely" and could be decided in the next 30 to 60 days. "It's a terrible act," Mr. Gabriel said after the meeting. "It seeks to take away years and years of legal precedent regarding zoning, and it's contradictory even within itself if you read the act. If not totally overturned, at least parts of it should be challenged and parts of it should be stricken."

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE REVIEW

Donnell Road waterline project set to begin in Lower Burrell NEW KENSINGTON — Work is slated to begin late this month or in early April on the Donnell Road waterline replacement project in Lower Burrell. After rejecting all six construction bids that came in over budget, New Kensington's municipal water authority on Thursday night decided to do the work itself. New Kensington supplies water to Lower Burrell. The project, affecting 82 homes, will go from the intersection of Donnell Road and Leechburg Road to 413 Donnell. The water authority budgeted \$360,000 for project, but doing the project with its work crew will save about \$150,000. Some work will be farmed out, such as using a firm with larger excavating equipment than the authority has, and another company that specializes in backfilling will be employed. All homes will be reconnected at no cost to the homeowner.

JOHNSTOWN TRIBUNE DEMOCRAT

Water testing vital near gas wells, specialist says EBENSBURG — Tim Bracken came to a Cambria County-sponsored Marcellus Shale meeting Thursday to learn more about the impact of gas well drilling on municipal water sources. Bracken, a Cambria Township supervisor, walked away armed with details about the new Marcellus drilling regulations – and concern about his private source of drinking water. He has a water well that he has never had tested, but now he plans to do so. "Oh yeah, I'm going to get it tested," Bracken said. Estimates are that more than 1 million Pennsylvania homeowners rely on private wells, and prior to the rush for Marcellus drilling more than half of the those wells had never been tested, Bryan Swistock, a Penn State water resource extension specialist, told the two dozen local officials in attendance. An equally disconcerting problem, Swistock said, is that most private citizens are unable to understand the results when their well water is tested. "I spent all of this morning on the phone going through water test reports, helping people to understand them," Swistock said. "It's a huge problem. We need to improve the education on water testing to help people to understand the reports."

DELAWARE COUNTY DAILY TIMES

Sewer authority seeking holding tank HAVERFORD — Representatives of the Radnor-Haverford-Marple Sewer Authority were back before the zoning hearing board on Thursday with revised plans for a 1.5-million-gallon "equalization" or holding tank to contain sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs) at Merry Place. The authority made an unsuccessful attempt in 2009 to obtain a height variance for an above ground tank at Genthert Field. Zoners denied

the application. The sewer authority has appealed. Authority solicitor William Toal said, however, officials have continued to seek solutions that respond to all community concerns. The current proposal is to install a 150-foot diameter, underground tank in the southwest corner of Merry Place, where volleyball courts are located. The tank's 13.5 foot walls would be below grade, except for a sloped roof rising one to two feet above. Additionally, tennis courts, buildings, existing vegetation and proposed landscaping will provide a visual buffer, officials said. The proposed site is located on township-owned property in the Ninth Ward, zoned ROS. Because it lies in a floodplain, RHM is again seeking a variance. Toal maintained the tank is needed because SSOs that recur during wet weather conditions spew fecal matter onto parkland, recreational areas and Darby Creek. The authority estimates these SSOs have exceeded 1 million gallons during severe incidents. Officials say the tank would be used exclusively to contain surcharges, releasing flow back into the system when levels recede. Engineer Fred Williams confirmed that the proposed location and design combine least possible amount of floodplain encroachment with ability to achieve necessary capacity, safety and maintenance goals, as well as a gravity-based system.

HARRISBURGH PATRIOT NEWS

Carlisle buildings evacuated in haz-mat incident Several buildings in the vicinity of the 200 block of Mulberry Avenue in Carlisle were evacuated this morning after police found an unknown chemical while initiating a search warrant, according to Cumberland County Department of Public Safety spokeswoman Megan Silverstrim. Silverstrim said police called in a hazardous material team, which was preparing to enter the building about 11 a.m. this morning. She could not confirm that the building contained a meth lab, as some have reported. She said police evacuated people within about a block as a precaution, but the public is not in danger at this time.

SCRANTON TIMES-TRIBUNE

Panelists: Some taking advantage of gas boom, some not A so-called "hot shot" driver recently made a pile of money for delivering a piece of drilling equipment to West Virginia in the middle of the night for a 20-hour repair, then drove it back. The delivery-on-demand hauler - one who pledges to deliver anything anytime - was cited as a successful entrepreneur taking advantage of the Marcellus Shale industry by Ryan Stalker, operations supervisor for Williams, an energy infrastructure company. Mr. Stalker was part of a panel discussion hosted by Lackawanna College and the University of Scranton on Thursday. Time is money in the natural gas industry, Mr. Stalker said. A downed compressor station costs him \$50,000 per hour. A drill site loses money every moment it is idle. "Gas is a seven-day-a-week job," he said. The panel told the audience of students and business people how to get into the gas industry by serving the gas industry. They talked about the implications of the gas boom. Some existing businesses still don't get it, they said. Rick Marquardt, director of the natural gas technology program at Lackawanna College, shudders when he sees pieces of fabricated and welded metal shipped in from Louisiana or Texas. "We have some of the best welding and metal fabricating companies in the country around here," he said. "There is nothing coming from out-of-state we can't provide."

WILKES-BARRE TIMES LEADER

Gas opportunities forum focus Event first in a series of entrepreneurship-focused forums hosted by colleges. SCRANTON – Few industries have spurred as much growth in Northeastern Pennsylvania in so short a span as the development of the Marcellus Shale. So the topic of drilling was fitting for the first in a series of entrepreneurship-focused public forums hosted by a consortium of local colleges at The University of Scranton on Thursday evening. Lackawanna College, The University of Scranton and the dozen other colleges comprising the Northeast Pennsylvania Technology Institute invited representatives of gas companies, utilities and ancillary industries to offer insight on how entrepreneurs can best capitalize on the opportunities offered by the gas industry. "We want to alert people who want to take advantage of the opportunities that have opened up in the community," said University of Scranton business school Dean Michael O. Mensah. "Anything to do with extraction industries has a lot of spinoffs for services that the shale drilling or whatever process will require." "These oil and gas companies; they don't want to own anything," said Rick Marquardt, director of the Natural Gas Technology Program at Lackawanna College. "They've got engineers, they've got geologists, they've got leases that they own, but they want to contract everything out. Owning drilling rigs even is a new concept that Chesapeake is trying out. We can

do this, but as entrepreneurs it's all about doing your homework." Stephen Pendrak of UGI Utilities added that opportunities abound for service providers in industries including banking and wealth management, accounting, legal services, recruiting, advertising and media, geology, trucking and entertainment, as well as for providers of tangible goods such as concrete, liquid fuels, pipe, drilling equipment and sand, among others. But breaking into the industry requires time and planning, especially because the declining price of gas has recently caused drilling companies to scale back their operations. "I don't think this industry's ever going away, but it's definitely going to slow down," said Adam Diaz, owner of several companies that provide services to the gas industry, including forestry, trucking, disposal and well drilling services. "It's happening right now... A lot of these companies are going back to Texas. We're sort of going through a bust right now."

ERIE TIMES-NEWS

Cost of North East Township sewer project rises NORTH EAST -- The price tag for sewer construction in North East Township is getting higher. Contractors who submitted "very, very competitive" construction bids in April said that wages and materials now cost \$150,000 more, project Engineer Doug Sceiford said. That's a 4 percent increase over the previous \$3.8 million in bids. The North East Township Water and Sewer Authority has not locked in the 2011 bids because of delays in securing construction rights of way, easements and funding. When the authority does award the contracts, it will probably be at the higher prices. The authority could seek new bids but would risk paying even more. "It's a crap shoot," Sceiford said. Sceiford, at the authority's direction, will ask contractors to extend their bids, which are scheduled to expire March 19. "I'm not sure that we'd save any money by rebidding. I think we'd more likely lose more money," authority Chairman David Montgomery said. Rising oil prices are responsible for some of the increased construction costs, especially for gasoline and PVC pipe, authority members said. "Prices are going up. Every time we have a delay in doing something here, it costs money," authority member Thomas Lowes said. Only one construction contract has been awarded so far, for sewer lines now being installed along Route 5. Water and Sewer Authority members discussed the higher costs during a special meeting at the township municipal building Thursday. Members met to set the connection charge that property owners will pay to the township once sewer lines are in place, but instead decided to study options and reconvene Monday.

LANCASTER NEWSPAPERS

City water-treatment company fined \$35,000 by EPA A Lancaster waste-treatment company has been fined \$35,000 for discharging industrial wastewater pollutants to Lancaster city's wastewater treatment plant. Armstrong Environmental Services, at 205 Greenfield Road, has agreed to pay the fine and take actions to minimize the likelihood of future violations, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. EPA said Armstrong, which is not associated with Armstrong World Industries, exceeded its permit limits for acidity levels, copper and oil and grease over five years. As part of the agreement, Armstrong did not admit liability for the alleged violations but has certified that it is now in compliance with applicable Clean Water Act requirements. Armstrong, founded in 1935, processes and disposes of a variety of municipal and industrial liquid and solid wastes for its customers. The alleged violations occurred at the company's waste-processing and disposal facility in Lancaster. The federal Clean Water Act requires companies discharging pollutants to publicly owned wastewater treatment works to obtain a permit limiting the amount of pollution that may be discharged to the plant. This usually requires some type of pretreatment by the discharging facility. Pretreatment permit limits are set for pollutants to prevent pollution of waterways caused by pollutants passing through the treatment plant or interference with the functioning of the treatment plant, EPA said.

ASSOCIATED PRESS (Pa.)

\$1B natural gas pipeline proposed for Pa. A proposed \$1 billion gas pipeline would connect production facilities in northeastern Pennsylvania's Marcellus Shale with markets south toward Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington. UGI Corp., Inergy Midstream L.P. and Capitol Energy Ventures proposed the 200-mile pipeline on Thursday. The companies set a completion goal of 2015 and still need regulatory approval. While the exact route of the proposed 30-inch Commonwealth Pipeline hasn't been determined, the companies say it would move at least 800,000 cubic feet of natural gas per day from the MARC I pipeline in Lycoming County south through eastern and central

WASHINGTON, D.C.

WASHINGTON POST

Boosted by regulations, a small business opens its own lobby shop Many small companies bemoan government regulations, but Electronic Recyclers International celebrates them — or at least one in particular. ERI recycles e-waste, and in the company's six-year history, the number of states with e-waste recycling laws has gone from three to 25. Most of these state-based laws mandate that companies like HP and Dell contract with e-waste recyclers to collect and recycle used electronics, including cell phones, computers and other gear. Consequently, the California-based ERI's revenue has more than tripled in the past six years, and it has grown from 73 to 420 employees. "E-waste is one of the fastest-growing solid waste streams in the world, and e-waste recycling is the fastest growing recycling opportunity in the world. We manage a problem that's been borne out of the technological revolution," said ERI founder John Shegerian, "and partly our growth is thanks to great legislation." In addition to profiting from regulations, the company also benefits from government waste, so to speak. In July of last year, a task force headed by the White House, EPA and GSA recommended that all electronics used by the federal government be processed by certified recyclers — such as ERI. The company swiftly joined the GSA schedule for electronics recycling. And, in a move that some experts say is unusual for a small business, the company also has opened a D.C. office as a way to lobby for stronger e-waste legislation on a national scale. "We will provide education and outreach to the GSA, Congress and the EPA to make sure they understand what it means to be a responsible recycler and what we can do for them," said Katie Reilly, who heads up the company's Washington branch.

Uncle Sam didn't welcome gay employees When it comes to the history of the federal government's treatment of gay employees, Uncle Sam should hang his head in shame. Sam's history is not just one of blocking gay men and lesbians from getting jobs or promotions. Documents indicate that the government actively sought them out for termination. The dry language of a Justice Department legal brief, filed in July 2011 in the case of a federal court employee seeking health benefits for her same-sex wife, outlines the federal government's "significant and regrettable role in the history of discrimination against gay and lesbian individuals." "For years, the federal government deemed gays and lesbians unfit for employment, barring them from federal jobs on the basis of their sexual orientation," the brief said. The language of bigotry is not so dry. A November 1950 Senate subcommittee report cited in the brief demonstrated the degree of homophobia in harsh, offensive terms. The report's title: "Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government." After running through one stereotype after another and saying gay people "must be treated as transgressors," the report renders the panel's conclusion: "In the opinion of this subcommittee homosexuals and other sex perverts are not proper persons to be employed in Government for two reasons; first, they are generally unsuitable and second, they constitute security risks."

Blog: Will 2012 feel like a comeback or a setback? Quick! Was 2011 or 2010 a better year for the economy? The answer is 2010, at least if you're looking at growth. That year -- widely considered a disappointing one for the recovery -- saw three percent economic growth. As for 2011, even with the strong fourth quarter, growth was only 1.7 percent. That's not so impressive. And yet this, right now, feels like a recovery. It feels like we turned the corner in 2011. 2010, meanwhile, felt like a setback. That's because we judge the economy based on its trend more than its level. The strongest growth in 2010 came early in the year. In the first quarter, the economy grew at an annualized rate of 3.9. By the fourth quarter, it had slowed to 2.3 percent. We lost speed, and it felt like we were losing our recovery. In 2011, the trend was just the opposite. The first quarter was terrible. Growth was 0.4 percent. But by the fourth quarter, growth had picked up to 3 percent. We had gained speed, and it felt like we were finally recovering. Still does, in fact. President Obama's reelection message is that America is making an economic comeback. And the facts back him up. The country is richer now than it was before the financial crisis, or than it's been at any other point in its history.

Cuba drills for oil; U.S. unprepared for potential spill As energy companies from Spain, Russia and Malaysia line up to drill for oil in Cuban waters 60 miles from the Florida Keys, U.S. agencies are struggling to cobble together

emergency plans to protect fragile reefs, sandy beaches and a multibillion-dollar tourism industry in the event of a spill. Drawing up contingency plans to confront a possible spill is much more difficult because of the economic embargo against Cuba. U.S. law bars most American companies — including oil services and spill containment contractors — from conducting business with the communist island. The embargo, now entering its 50th year, also limits direct government-to-government talks. In the vacuum, a Coast Guard admiral in Miami and a dozen technocrats from Cuba and the United States have begun to quietly engage in an awkward partnership of necessity to protect their coastlines, separated by politics but united by the mighty Gulf Stream.

DELAWARE

WILMINGTON NEWS JOURNAL

Think gas is too pricey? Just wait Gas prices in Delaware and across the nation are reaching record-high levels for this time of year and are poised to break through all-time highs in the spring.

DELAWARE CAPE GAZETTE

Prescribed burn an impressive collaboration - VIDEO Delaware environmental and forestry personnel completed a prescribed burn in a remote area of Cape Henlopen State Park on Tuesday this week. The exercise involving a total of 24 acres demonstrated how divisions can work together to accomplish specific goals they would be unlikely to accomplish otherwise. The forestry personnel, trained in fighting fires as well as controlling them for a sanitizing effect, brought out specialized equipment for the task including two customized Kubota all-terrain vehicles with 70-gallon water tanks and foam fire-fighting equipment. Those vehicles are designed to allow personnel to get into very remote areas such as the thickets at the northern edge of Gordons Pond where this week's prescribed burn took place. The burn was designed to take out dry and dangerous tinder that could cause larger wildfires. However, special care was taken to preserve larger pines, red maples and other trees. Personnel cleared large circles around specific trees of special interest to prevent fast-moving fires from creating fatal damage. While the exercise will help remove potential fire problems and open up the area beneath the trees so a variety of native and noninvasive plant species have a better chance to thrive, the prescribed burn also gave personnel a chance to use their skills at setting up fire breaks and precisely controlling the movement of fire when it is being used as a tool.

WEST VIRGINIA

CHARLESTON GAZETTE

Commentary: Hydraulic fracturing is safe, and it boosts our economy CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Hydraulic fracturing for oil and natural gas offers an opportunity to build a more competitive U.S. economy. Programs that result in the establishment of less expensive energy sources boost U.S. manufacturing and jobs. Combined with horizontal drilling, hydraulic fracturing is a technique being used to produce shale gas that now accounts for more than a third of U.S. gas production. That has led to an abundance of natural gas, which is helping manufacturing. After many years in decline, the chemical and steel industries are beginning to come back. A \$650-million steel factory is under construction in Youngstown, Ohio, to produce piping for new wells needed to extract natural gas from the Marcellus Shale that underlies 50,000 square miles from West Virginia to New York. Also, chemical companies are investing in new plants to turn ethane made from shale gas into feedstock for plastics and fertilizer.

Kanawha County Spring Cleanup on Saturday CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Kanawha County Spring Cleanup has

been scheduled for 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday at Southridge Centre, behind Sam's Club. Trash, debris, electronics, recyclables and tires will be accepted (you must have a W.Va. ID to drop off tires). Items not accepted include hazardous waste, gas/propane tanks, paint, chemicals and motor oil. Upcoming cleanups will be in Cabin Creek, March 17; Elkview, March 31; and Institute, April 14. The events are sponsored by the Kanawha County Commission, the Kanawha County Solid Waste Authority and the state Department of Environmental Protection. For information, call 304-357-0570 or visit www.kanawha.us.

WEST VIRGINIA STATE JOURNAL

Welch settles with EPA on sewage overflow violation The city of Welch will implement a \$16 million to \$23 million long-term control plan to eliminate combined sewer overflows, and it will pay out a \$5,000 penalty split between state and federal regulators. The implementation is the result of a settlement reached with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for violations of the Clean Water Act. The plan will separate the southern West Virginia town's sanitary wastewater and sewage. According to a news release from the EPA, Welch was discharging approximately 400,000 gallons of raw sewage annually. The agency reached settlements related to combined sewer overflows in Elkins in October 2011 and in Fort Gay in January 2012. "Untreated sewage contains many types of organisms which can cause illness," the release from the EPA states. "People coming in contact with these organisms can suffer adverse health effects ranging from minor ailments such as sore throats, stomach cramps and diarrhea, to life-threatening illnesses such as cholera, dysentery, infectious hepatitis and severe gastroenteritis. Children, the elderly, people with weakened immune systems and pregnant women are more at risk of illness." The current sewer system collects various wastewater sources and pipes it to a sewage treatment plant. During high water events, the system can be overwhelmed, discharging untreated water contaminated with human waste, toxic material, debris and industrial waste. The city of Welch was sued over violations of National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System and Clean Water Act violations by the state Department of Environmental Protection and the EPA last year. According to information from the EPA website, combined sewer overflows present a problem for more than 772 U.S. cities, including several in West Virginia.

ASSOCIATED PRESS (W. Va.)

W.Va. to keep tabs on brownfields CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- State officials say redeveloping former industrial sites that are free of contamination is important to West Virginia's economic future and lawmakers are hoping that offering potential buyers access to environmental data and monitoring will make the properties more desirable. Known as brownfields, the former industrial sites include corner gas stations, abandoned salvage yards, mining sites or chemical sites. Despite once being contaminated with pesticides or harmful chemicals, the properties are seen as prime real estate because flat, developable land is a rare commodity in West Virginia. Amid a flurry of votes Wednesday, the Senate passed a bill to establish a quasi-governmental agency to oversee ongoing environmental maintenance at industrial sites that have been cleaned up. It also would track and record contamination and cleanup efforts, and accept donated land to hold for future sale and reuse. The bill now goes to the House of Delegates.

W.Va. city agrees to eliminate sewer overflows CHARLESTON — The city of Welch has agreed to implement a long-term plan to eliminate sewer overflows as part of a settlement involving violations of the Clean Water Act. The settlement was announced Thursday by the state and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Under the settlement filed by the Justice Department in federal court, the city will separate its sanitary wastewater and storm sewers at an estimate cost of \$16 million to \$23 million. In addition, the city will work toward upgrading its treatment plant and monitoring system. The EPA says about 400,000 gallons of raw sewage had been discharged annually in Welch. It marks the EPA's third settlement in recent months involving municipal wastewater violations. Sewage overflow cases were settled with Elkins in October and with Fort Gay in January.

MARYLAND

BALTIMORE SUN

Patuxent Wildlife Refuge scientists study how wind farms affect sea ducks Close to 1 million waterfowl spend their winters in the Chesapeake Bay, providing recreational hunting and bird watching for locals and visitors. But the call for construction of wind farms of more than 100 turbines about 10 miles offshore presented a question scientists could not answer: Will the turbines affect the birds? With funding from the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, or BOEM, scientists at Patuxent Wildlife Refuge Center are pioneering studies to understand the lifestyle of East Coast sea ducks to try to answer this question. "We are spending millions of dollars to figure out where the birds are on the Atlantic coast ... so that, to the best of our ability, we can locate wind farms where the fewest birds are," said Jim Woehr, who has been an avian biologist for more than 30 years and is a member of BOEM's Division of Environmental Assessment.

Sparrows Point tin mill to be temporarily idled Timing and length of temporary shutdown unknown. The owner of the troubled Sparrows Point steel plant plans to temporarily idle its tin mill operation, the United Steelworkers union said Thursday.

SALISBURY DAILY TIMES

Wind turbine project hits snag CRISFIELD -- The construction of a wind energy system to power Crisfield's sewage treatment plant will likely be delayed after city officials learned this week they must first pay for a study on how it will affect the power grid. Delmarva Power is requiring the study be done and has asked for \$35,000, but it's money the city doesn't have, said Mayor Percy "P.Jay" Purnell. "I don't have \$35,000 lying around," he said. "Even 35 cents is a stretch." Purnell said he has contacted the Maryland Department of the Environment to see if the city can use some of the \$4.8 million grant it was awarded to pay for the study. More importantly, he hopes MDE will front the money, otherwise it will have to come out of a city budget that is already stretched thin. "My question is, how far out on a limb do we have to go?" he said. "It's unnerving." Under the terms of the grant, the state won't release the funds until the project is ready to begin construction. Jay Apperson, a spokesman for MDE, said state officials are looking into whether the grant can be used for the impact study. "No final determination has been made," he said.

Editorial: No real need to fear the ocean The University of Florida has published a study that might make some wary of the ocean, but beachgoers in Maryland and Delaware should have no fear. According to the study, shark attacks reached a 20-year high in 2011, but in American waters -- including off the coast of Florida, where most U.S. shark sightings occur -- the number of attacks declined. Lucky for us, sharks have never been a real concern here. According to the International Shark Attack File, there have been no unprovoked shark attacks in Maryland since records began in 1678. In Delaware, only three shark attacks have been recorded with no fatalities. But that doesn't mean our resort towns don't have scares. In summer 2010, there was a definite increase in shark sightings along the East Coast. New Jersey closed its beaches for a short time in July, and sightings of great white sharks off the coast of Massachusetts closed resort beaches during Labor Day weekend. In July of that year, a juvenile male white shark was caught in the Delaware Bay. Last year, to prevent anglers from drawing sharks toward the beach, the state of Delaware changed its shark-fishing regulations.

MARYLAND GAZETTE NEWSPAPERS

Letter: 'Sensible steps' to cleaner water I am a longtime resident of Prince George's County. I have been involved in stream quality evaluation and fish passage cleanup. The rivers and streams of Prince George's County are badly polluted, which is bad for public health and damages our economy. For the first time, there is real power in the effort to clean up the water of Maryland: all six states in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and Washington, D.C., are working together to achieve meaningful pollution reductions. It's worth noting, we're now more than halfway to the goals we set 20 years ago for a restored Bay. But persistent dead zones, closed beaches and fish kills

demonstrate we have a way to go. To make sure Maryland finishes the job, 14 environmental groups around the state, including the Anacostia Watershed Society, the Patuxent Riverkeeper and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, have formed a coalition to support several important bills now being considered by the Maryland General Assembly. Those bills would increase the so-called "flush tax" to finish upgrading all 67 sewage plants in the state, require new homes to use the best available waste disposal technology and provide funding to local governments to deal with polluted runoff.

SOUTHERN MARYLAND NEWSPAPERS

Natural gas could mean big bucks for Maryland, study says Maryland would reap about \$441 million over 30 years in severance taxes if natural gas is extracted from the Marcellus shale formation under the state's two westernmost counties, according to a study released Thursday by the Maryland Petroleum Council. "It should be noted that our estimates are pretty conservative," said Anirban Basu, an economist whose Sage Policy Group conducted the study. That estimate — which includes about \$214 million in revenue for the state, \$162 million for Garrett County and \$65 million for Allegany County — assumes that Maryland approves drilling and that the industry decides it is worth tapping about 710.1 billion cubic feet of reserves estimated to be available thousands of feet below the two counties. Depending on whether low or high production is allowed, the state and two counties stand to gain \$242.1 million to \$642 million from severance taxes. The taxes are based on a 2 percent state levy and a 5.5 percent local levy. Local impacts particularly would be "enormous," Basu said. Not only could landowners who lease land for drilling receive between about \$339 million and \$732 million in royalties, but about 1,800 more Marylanders could be working in shale gas production by 2025, according to the study. That is when production is expected to peak before declining under a projected 30-year span involving 365 wells. Although Basu said Thursday that many of the jobs directly associated with drilling and production would go to people who could learn the necessary skills on the job, skeptics contend that many of the workers would come from out of state, including shale gas production sites operating nearby in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Del. Kevin Kelly said he supports Gov. Martin O'Malley's (D) executive order, which mandated a three-stage study to determine what the state needs to do to protect the state and residents from harm before allowing drilling.

VIRGINIA

NORFOLK VIRGINIAN-PILOT

Shipyard that handled 'ghost fleet' moves on CHESAPEAKE-- Bay Bridge Enterprises, a small ship-recycling facility that played a big role in dismantling much of the James River Reserve Fleet, also known as the "ghost fleet," has closed its gates and quietly moved away. Gone, too, are more than 50 jobs at the shipyard, tucked away on a rutted dirt lot in an industrial part of Chesapeake on the Southern Branch of the Elizabeth River. Its closure leaves just one salvage yard on the East Coast certified to break down old, unwanted Navy and cargo ships owned by the U.S. Maritime Administration, an agency spokeswoman said this week. That lone facility, BB Metals Enterprise in Baltimore, opened last year. Bay Bridge Enterprises is moving to Brownsville, Texas, near the Mexico border, where four other ship-breaking yards are located. It also has taken a new name: Bay Bridge Texas, said Barry Chambers, senior vice president of the new venture. To be set on 34 acres within the port of Brownsville, Bay Bridge is building a new ship-recycling yard and salvage area. The operation, nearly complete, is expected to employ between 50 and 125 employees, Chambers said by phone from Texas.

WSLS-TV ROANOKE

Lynchburg CSO funding uncertain amid budget turmoil A bill that would provide \$28 million for Lynchburg's combined sewer overflow program died in a House subcommittee Wednesday, but the money is buried in another dead bill that still could be resurrected. "We will get another bite at that apple," said Sen. Steve Newman, R-Lynchburg. An appropriations subcommittee killed Senate Bill 494, which included CSO funds as part of a Senate-

proposed bond package to pay for \$628 million of water-quality projects statewide. Included was \$23 million for Lynchburg. While SB 494 is dead for the year, the CSO money was woven into the Senate's version of the state budget, Newman said. The budget bill itself was killed Tuesday, at the hands of Senate Democrats. But when the state's operating budget is on the line, killed doesn't necessarily mean dead. Despite tough talk from both sides, many legislators said privately a budget eventually will emerge. Newman, who is a member of the Senate Finance Committee, said he would try to keep the funding alive in any new budget bill that comes up. "CSO bonds are now embedded inside the Senate budget, and we need that vehicle for negotiations," Newman said. The proposed \$28 million would complete the state's obligation to assist Lynchburg with its federally mandated program to halt untreated sewage that flushes into the James River during rainstorms. Much of the CSO program has been completed, but its remaining cost still is estimated at more than \$200 million.

CHARLOTTESVILLE DAILY PROGRESS

Nature enthusiast to speak at Paramount Richard Louv, who coined the term "nature deficit disorder," will give a local talk on how people of all ages can reconnect with nature. In his book "Last Child in the Woods," Louv suggested that children are separated from the natural world because of obesity, attention deficit disorder, emotional stress and diminished creativity. His latest book, "The Nature Principle," suggests that adults also need nature and recommends living a better life through bringing nature into personal spaces. Louv will discuss his books at 7 p.m. on March 15 at the Paramount Theater. His talk is sponsored by the Piedmont Environmental Council, among others.

ASSOCIATED PRESS (Va.)

ICF International wins \$15M EPA contract to work on federal transportation initiatives FAIRFAX, Va. — Consulting and technology services provider ICF International has been awarded a \$15 million contract with the Environmental Protection Agency. The Fairfax-based company said Thursday the contract with the EPA will help with the evaluation of emissions and other pollutants produced by transportation. The contract awarded by the EPA's Office of Transportation and Air Quality has a term of five years ICF says it will provide technical support for the evaluations and developments of technologies related to emissions control, fuels, as well as transportation-related environmental and public health impacts. The contractor has supported these EPA efforts under previous contracts since 1989.

MISCELLANEOUS

BNA DAILY ENVIRONMENT REPORT

API Asks Obama to Designate EPA as Lead Agency on Fracking The American Petroleum Institute calls on the Obama administration to consolidate the work of several federal agencies that are examining hydraulic fracturing in order to avoid overlapping, duplicative regulations on the oil and gas industry, saying EPA should be the lead agency in the reviews.

EPA Identifies 83 Chemicals for Study, Possible Regulatory Action EPA releases a work plan listing 83 chemicals or groups of chemicals for which it will conduct risk assessments. EPA's chemicals office says, if warranted, it will take risk management actions for these chemicals, meaning it may regulate some of them. Of the 83 chemicals or chemical families, EPA already has begun assessing the risks of seven and says that some of these assessments will be completed by the end of 2012

Uniform Emissions Rules Proposed for Petroleum Refining, Chemicals EPA proposes emissions standards for several sources in the petroleum refining and chemical sectors to make the standards more consistent. Specifically, the proposed rule would set national uniform emissions standards for storage vessels and transfer operations, equipment leaks, and closed vent systems and control devices. EPA intends for the uniform standards to be

referenced by future rules that revise national emissions standards for hazardous air pollutants and new source performance standards for both the petroleum refining and chemical sectors

West Virginia City to Spend Up to \$23 Million to Stem Sewer Overflows Welch, W.Va., agrees to spend up to \$23 million to eliminate combined sewer overflows, under a settlement with the state and EPA. The city will implement a long-term control plan that will completely separate sanitary wastewater and storm sewers, resolving violations of the Clean Water Act and bringing Welch into compliance with its National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit. Under the consent decree all work must be completed by Dec. 31, 2027.

Use of Beach Data for Inland Waters Criteria Spurs Concern Among States State water officials express concern over EPA's decision to use data from studies of nine beaches to draft recreational water quality criteria for coastal and inland waters, saying that could lead to erroneous assessments of inland waters. The state officials fear that the beach study data do not account for variability in conditions of inland streams, such as flow rates and fluctuating bacteria levels. Sampling, as proposed by EPA in its draft criteria, would yield incorrect data about fecal bacteria, leading to warnings of potential contamination and bans on swimming and other water contact sports, the state officials say.

Federal Agencies Barred From Disposing of Electronic Waste in Landfills Federal agencies will no longer be permitted to dispose of electronic waste in landfills and must send waste to certified third-party recyclers for end-of-life disposal, under new guidelines released by the General Services Administration. The federal government will be encouraged to maximize the use of technology by sharing equipment among agencies and will be required to recycle electronic waste that can no longer be reused. The government also will establish a tracking system for all electronic waste, requiring federal agencies to submit annual reports on how they are managing the waste

THE TENNESSEAN

Ramsey says bill stops mountaintop removal; not so, advocates say Lt. Gov. Ron Ramsey has praised action taken on a bill that he said now clarifies Tennessee's prohibition on mountaintop removal for coal mining. While advocates for banning the blowing up of the state's mountaintops and ridgetops were pleased that Ramsey says it's important to not allow the practice, they say the bill as re-written is a sham. A last-minute amendment to the Tennessee Scenic Vistas Protection Act gutted the bill, its sponsor, Sen. Eric Stewart, D-Belvidere, said Wednesday. Ramsey, however, declared that Senate Bill 577 as amended by Sen. Mike Bell, R-Riceville, codifies the current regulatory practice that prohibits mountaintop mining in Tennessee. "After years of controversy on this issue, I believe we have finally reached a point that all honest stakeholders in this process can be proud of," Ramsey said in a press release. "The language adopted today would remove all doubt and make clear that mountaintop mining will not be allowed in Tennessee."

WOUB-TV ATHENS, OHIO

Researchers Investigate Links Between Fracking And Water Contamination On the morning of December 15, 2007, Thelma and Richard Payne were jolted from their bed by surprise. "Things were crashing all over the place and it sounded like somebody was out there in the other room pulling out drawers and just letting them drop, and I thought, 'Somebody's out there ransacking our house.'" But it wasn't a thief that caused the commotion. "I got out of bed and looked and I saw of these things happening. The floor parting, the ceiling cracking, the side walls cracking, and hearing all of this stuff falling," said Richard. Their Bainbridge, Ohio home of 51 years had exploded and shifted on its foundation. Across the street on the same morning, Ruth Cooper woke up to an unusual sight in her garage. "When we opened up the garage door, there's this water up in the air, six feet in the air like a fountain," she said. That water was coming from her well. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources determined that highly pressurized methane had entered their aquifer. Ohio Valley Energy was held accountable for improperly constructing and monitoring a vertical well at the end of the road... The state says what happened in Bainbridge was a one time problem -- but in the small city of Dimock, Pennsylvania, water contamination has plagued their town. It's been at the center of a national debate over gas drilling and the extraction technique known as hydraulic

fracturing. It's a process where millions of gallons of sand, water, and chemicals are blasted deep into the earth. This shatters underground shale and frees natural gas for collection. For Ron and Jean Carter, this process has hit home. In 2009, Cabot Oil & Gas drilled a well about 300 feet from their front porch. It was after they started drilling that Jean became concerned. "I noticed the water had an odor to it. Put a little in a glass, tasted it, and I thought, 'Uh oh. We have a problem,'" she said.

WOUB panel explores ins, outs, pros, cons of fracking WOUB's live panel discussion on fracking, "Newswatch In-Depth: Fracking Frenzy," aired Tuesday evening, providing a forum for southeast Ohio to ask questions or join the discussion via phone calls, emails, tweets, or Facebook messages. Tim Sharp, news director of WOUB, and *Athens NEWS* Editor Terry Smith served as moderators for the panel discussion, which featured four experts and/or advocates on different sides of the controversial issue. Representing the pro-fracking side were Terry Fleming, executive director of the Ohio Petroleum Council, and Robert W. Chase, professor and chair of the Department of Petroleum Engineering and Geology at Marietta College. Representing the other side of the issue were Natalie Kruse, an assistant professor of environmental studies at Ohio University, and Bernhard Debatin, a professor of journalism and representative of "Slow Down Fracking in Athens County," a citizens group. People who support oil and gas development in Athens County and the surrounding region argue that a local boom in fracking will greatly benefit the economically depressed region economically. Fleming discussed this aspect of the issue at length. "It's one of the best things to happen to the state of Ohio, maybe ever," he declared. "Having grown up in Appalachia — I grew in Marietta..., the exciting thing for me is it happening in a part of the state that needs it the worst, a part of the state that's been in despair, high unemployment, hopelessness," Fleming said. "Now there is an opportunity not just in the oil field but in the auxiliary jobs that are created. The jobs that are going to be created not just at the oil patch but as a result of this are going to be a real economic boom to a part of the state that is long overdue." On the other side of the issue, however, fracking skeptics, both in emails and calls and on the WOUB panel, raised concerns about fracking operations contaminating groundwater and how that could cripple the burgeoning local foods movement in Athens County and elsewhere. More than 230 people from Athens and other counties in the areas recently signed a letter to the Athens County Commissioners, asking them to protect local land, air and water from the possible negative impacts of fracking.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Estimates Clash for How Much Natural Gas in the United States Natural gas is now flowing so fast into U.S. pipelines that the big question seems to be what to do with it all: Engineer cars to run on methanol? Reopen shuttered chemical plants that rely on gas for feedstock? Export liquefied gas by tanker? With about two-thirds of U.S. states thought to hold natural gas reserves, many take President Barack Obama seriously when he calls the United States the "Saudi Arabia of natural gas." But just how much natural gas does the United States have? A close look at the assessments shows that even the experts disagree. Most dramatically, the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), the government's own analytical team, last month slashed in half its estimate for a key and large subset of reserves: the amount of gas in shale rock formations across the country. Although the government's new estimate for total U.S. natural gas resources—2,214 trillion cubic feet (tcf)—is a third higher than its 2008 estimate, the shale gas markdown underscores the uncertainties around this new supply source. In an interview with National Geographic News, the EIA has offered a sneak preview of the more detailed explanation it will publish in April on why its shale gas estimate plummeted. But with other geologists convinced that EIA's new numbers are too conservative, it is certain that there will be plenty of debate ahead on the size of the energy windfall from shale gas.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Polish report: shale gas procedure produces toxic refuse but does not harm environment WARSAW, Poland — A scientific study in Poland has found that shale gas extraction at one site produced some toxic refuse but that the waste was reused and didn't harm the environment. The report was presented Friday by the Polish Geological Institute, which carried out its study last year when a company, Canadian Lane Energy, began test drilling near Lebien, in northern Poland. Poland has some deposits of shale gas and is hoping to exploit them to cut its

dependence on Russian natural gas. It hopes to repeat what has happened in the United States, where large shale gas discoveries in the past 10 years have given the country independence in the gas sector. However, it's still unclear just how much might exist in Poland, and the process of extracting it has come under fire by environmentalists. In hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, a technology developed in the United States, large quantities of pressurized water and some chemicals are used to break underground rocks and release gas trapped in them. Most of the water remains underground, but some returns to the surface and is toxic.

Environmentalists urge Mexico to cancel huge resort planned near coral reef MEXICO CITY — One of Mexico's most successful environmental rescue projects, a newly thriving coral reef, is under threat from a Cancun-sized mega-development planned for the Baja California Peninsula, activists said Thursday as they staged a protest to put pressure on the Spanish developer. The project would transform the village of Cabo Pulmo from a sleepy clutch of bungalows and small homes into a development with the equivalent of about 30,000 hotel rooms, golf courses and a marina on a strip of seaside desert about a 90-minute drive northeast of the Los Cabos resorts.

Two-thirds of China's cities fail on air standards BEIJING - A senior Chinese environmental official says two-thirds of China's cities currently fail to meet stricter air quality standards that the government wants to phase in over the next four years. The State Council on Wednesday issued new limits on pollutants to go into effect nationwide by 2016. It also said major cities must launch programs this year to regularly monitor additional kinds of pollutants for the first time, including fine particles associated with health problems. Vice Minister of Environmental Protection Wu Xiaoqing said Friday that the government estimates that two-thirds of Chinese cities do not meet the new standards. The government imposed the new air quality rules in response to public pressure over pollution and the lack of thorough information about air quality in China.